



P A N D E M I C F L U

P U B L I C I N F O R M A T I O N S E R I E S

Family Preparedness Fact Sheet

The flu, also known as influenza, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses. In the United States, flu season begins every fall and ends every spring. The flu people get during this season is called seasonal flu. Sometimes, a new type of flu virus may emerge to which people have no resistance. When this happens, it can spread more easily from person to person around the world in a very short time, causing serious illness and death. This is pandemic flu.

The exact symptoms of pandemic flu are unknown. However, they are expected to be similar to those of seasonal flu, which are—

- fever
- sore throat
- cough
- runny or stuffy nose
- extreme tiredness
- headache
- muscle aches and pains
- stomach problems, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children)

Contact a health care provider if you have any questions about specific symptoms. Visit www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm for more detailed flu symptom information.

Pandemic Flu: the Disease

Pandemic flu is more serious than seasonal flu. Most people who get seasonal flu recover within a week or two and do not require medical treatment. The very young, the very old and the very sick are most likely to become seriously ill from seasonal flu. Pandemic flu is different because more people who get it might not recover, even with medical treatment, and people of every age may be at risk of serious illness or death.

Unlike seasonal flu, there may not be a vaccine for pandemic flu until researchers and pharmaceutical companies are able to create one. Vaccine development depends on the scientific understanding of the specific virus causing the disease. If a vaccine is developed for pandemic flu, it will be a challenge to produce enough for everyone and dispense it to all the people that need it in a timely manner.

Flu Pandemic: the Event

An influenza pandemic is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza virus, to which people have little or no immunity, appears in the human population. It causes a serious illness that spreads easily from person to person worldwide.

Pandemics are different from seasonal outbreaks of influenza. Seasonal outbreaks are caused by subtypes of influenza viruses that are already in existence among people, whereas pandemic outbreaks are caused by new subtypes or by subtypes that have never circulated among people or that have not circulated among people in a long time. Scientists cannot accurately predict whether the avian flu (H₅N₁) virus will cause the next human pandemic or when the next pandemic will occur.

In the 20th century, flu pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968. The 1918 pandemic led to high levels of illness, death, social disruption and economic loss. It is estimated it killed more than 20 million people worldwide.

Flu Pandemic: Preparedness

During a flu pandemic, government officials may impose activity, movement or travel restrictions to prevent the flu virus from spreading. You may be asked to stay home for an extended period of time even if you are not sick. Schools, workplaces and public gatherings, such as sporting events or worship services, may close temporarily. Mass transportation—such as subways, buses, trains and air travel—may be limited. You and your family and friends may need to rely on each other.

Think about how you handle stress and know your strengths. Take steps to plan for, get through and recover from a flu pandemic.

- Store a two-week supply of food that does not require refrigeration, preparation or cooking. Ensure that formula for infants and any child's or older person's special nutritional needs are a part of your planning. Plan for your pets as well.
- Store a two-week supply of water, 1 gallon of water per person per day, in clean plastic containers. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, such as milk cartons or glass bottles.

- Ask your health care provider and health insurance company if you can get an extra supply of your regular prescription drugs and medical supplies, such as glucose monitoring supplies.
- Store a supply of any nonprescription drugs, such as pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, stomach remedies and anti-diarrheal medication, as well as vitamins and fluids with electrolytes (such as sports drinks).
- Store health and cleaning supplies, such as bleach, tissues, a thermometer, disposable gloves, soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick.
- Ask your employer about plans to have staff stay home when they are sick or a family member is. Request details on any special considerations regarding sick leave, benefits and wages if staying home.
- Find out your employer's plans to keep the business functioning if key staff can't come to work.
- Ask your child's school or day care if they plan to encourage sick children to stay home during a flu pandemic or if they will close, requiring children to remain at home.

Pandemic Flu: Prevention

There are some things that everyone can do to slow the spread of the flu and reduce its impact, whatever kind it is. Some of these actions are—

- Wash your hands with soap and water or clean them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often. Wash hands for at least 15 seconds.
 - For visibly soiled hands, first wash with soap and water.
 - When using soap and water, first wet hands with

water, apply an amount of product recommended by the manufacturer to hands, and rub hands together vigorously, covering all surfaces of the hands, giving attention to fingernails and surfaces where jewelry is worn. Rinse hands with water and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel. Use towel to turn off faucet.

- For hands that are not visibly soiled, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% - 95% alcohol), or wash with soap and water or do both.
- When using an alcohol-based sanitizer, use directed amount of sanitizer, rub thoroughly over all surfaces of the hands, including nail areas and between the fingers. Rub until product dries.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and clean your hands afterwards with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. If tissueless, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm, not your hands.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth to keep germs from entering your body.
- Stay home if you are feeling sick. Get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Avoid close contact with sick people. Respiratory droplets passed from one person to another spreads flu.
- Avoid sharing objects—such as utensils, cups, bottles and telephones—or disinfect objects before using them.
- Keep your living and work areas clean.

Finding out the answers ahead of time will have a significant impact on your plans and decisions during a flu pandemic.

Contact your local Red Cross chapter for a pandemic flu family preparedness guide. Contact a health care provider if you have any questions. For more information, visit www.redcross.org, www.pandemicflu.gov and www.who.int.



American Red Cross